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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine how adolescent and parental perceptions of selected parental qualities predicted adolescent conformity to parental expectations, using symbolic interaction as a conceptual foundation. Self-report questionnaire data were collected from a sample of 326 families with adolescents. Four separate multiple regression analyses were used to examine adolescent and parental perceptions of adolescent conformity to fathers and mothers. Each of the four regression models explained significant amounts of variance in perceptions of adolescent conformity. Results indicated that several dimensions of adolescent perceptions of parental power and behaviors predicted adolescents' reports of conformity to their parents. In contrast, parental reports of their own conformity yielded a significant beta for only one relationship, mothers' reports of positive induction as a predictor of mothers' reports of adolescent conformity. A major conclusion drawn from these findings was that adolescent perceptions of parental power and behaviors may serve as better predictors of adolescent conformity than parental perceptions. Further, the need to examine multiple perceptions in parent-adolescent relations within the symbolic interactionist framework was supported. (Author)

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Parental Qualities as Predictors of Adolescent Conformity: Perceptions from Adolescents, Mothers, and Fathers*

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Parental Qualities as Predictors of Adolescent Conformity: Perceptions from Adolescents, Mothers, and Fathers

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine how adolescent and parental perceptions of selected parental qualities predicted adolescent conformity to parental expectations, using symbolic interaction as a conceptual foundation. Self-report questionnaire data were collected from a sample of 326 families with adolescents. Four separate multiple regression analyses were used to examine adolescent and parental percpetions of adolescent conformity to fathers and mothers. Each of the four regression models explained significant amounts of variance in perceptions of adolescent conformity. Results indicated that several dimensions of adolescent perceptions of parental power and behaviors predicted adolescents' reports of conformity to their parents. In contrast, parental reports of their own conformity yielded a significant beta for only one relatinship, mothers' reports of positive induction as a predictor of mothers' reports of adolescent conformity. A major conclusion drawn from these findings was that adolescent perceptions of parental power and behaviors may serve as better predictors of adolescent conformity that parental perceptions. Further, the need for examining multiple perceptions in parent-adolescent relations within the symbolic interactionist framework was supported.

Parental Qualities as Predictors of Adolescent Conformity: Perceptions from Adolescents, Mothers, and Fathers

In families with adolescents, an important developmental challenge is to balance adolescents' increasing autonomy with parents' continued responsibilities for the youth (Damon, 1975; McGoldrick & Carter, 1982; Peterson, 1986; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). During adolescence, youth tend to decline in their conformity to parents in favor of greater social roles outside the family (Montemayor, 1986). Yet, recent scholarship indicates that while adolescent conformity to parental expectaions tends to decrease during adolescence, parents tend to be viewed as responsible for the actions of youth during the adolescent years (Sampsom, 1977). Thus, parents are challenged with allowing adolescents to increse in autonomy while continuing to seek a degree of conformity among the youth toward parental expectations. The present study, therefore, examined parental and adolescent perceptions of parental qualities as predictors of adolescent conformity to parental expectations.

Previous literature has hypothesized that specific parenting styles are associated with greater conformity of adolescents to parental expectations (Rollins & Thomas, 1975; 1979). For example, several scholars have identified parental power bases and parental behaviors as important predictors of adolescent conformity to parents (Henry, Wilson, & Peterson, 1989; Peterson, Rollins, & Thomas, 1985). Yet, previous empirical studies of parental qualities as predictors of adolescent conformity have relied upon adolescents' perceptions

phenomena such as of parental power bases, parental behaviors, and adolescent conformity to parents (e.g., Henry, Wilson, & Peterson, 1989; Peterson, Rollins, & Thomas, 1985).

Recently, scholars from both the symbolic interaction (e.g., Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986; Peterson & Rollins, 1987) and family systems approaches (e.g., Olson et al., 1983) have emphasized the need to examine issues in parent-adolescent relations from multiple perspectives (i.e., adolescent, father, and mother). Thus, the present study was designed to examine adolescent perceptions of parental power bases, adolescent perceptions of parental behaviors and parental perceptions of parental behaviors as predictors of parental and adolescent perceptions of adolescent conformity to parental expectations. Since previous empirical studies of parental power bases and parental behaviors as predictors of adolescent conformity have emphasized adolescents' perceptions (Henry, Wilson, & Peterson, 1989; Peterson, Rollins, & Thomas), the present study is expected to expand the theoretical understanding of adolescent conformity to parental expectations to represent a more symbolic interactionist perspective. Examination of the similarities (i.e., shared symbolic meanings) and differences (i.e., individual definitions of the situation) in adolescent and parental perceptions of parental qualities as predictors of adolescent conformity to parental expectations provides insights into.

Based upon these ideas, it was hypothesized that parental expert, legitimate, and reward powers would be positive predictors of both parental and adolescent perceptions of adolescent conformity to

parents, while parental coercive was hypothesized to be negatively related to both parental and adolescent perceptions of adolescent conformity. In addition, it was hypothesized that adolescent and parental perceptions of parental support and positive induction would be positive predictors of parental and adolescent perceptions of adolescent conformity, while both parental negative induction and coercion were expected to be negative predictors of both perceptions of adolescent conformity. Further, the gender of the adolescent, parental marital status, and father's occupational level (a measure of socioeconomic status) were examined as possible predictors of adolescent and parental perceptions of adolescent conformity.

Method

Sample

This study was part of a larger project with an identified population for 956 adolescents within a nonmetropolitain high school in the southeastern United States and their parents. Data from the adolescents were obtained through questionnaires administered in the subjects' high school English classes. Two parental questionnaires were sent home with the adolescents to completed separately by the mothers and fathers in their homes. Each parent was instructed to mail their completed questionnaires in a self-addressed envelope to the project director. A total of 657 adolescents (67%) and 822 parents participated in the total project. A subsample of 326 mother-adolescent and 295 father-adolescent dyads was used for the present study. Although considerable variability was found in the

socioeconomic levels of the families, the sample tended to be lower middle class.

Measurement

Measure of Adolescent Confomrity. Adolescent perceptions of conformity was measured using an 9-item Likert-type scale adapted from Thomas, Gecas, Weigart, and Rooney (1974). This scale asked adolescents the extent to which they would conform to parental expectations on several issues (e.g., dress, choice of entertainment, educational goals, career goals, choice of friends, school attendance, marriage). Wording on the orignial 9-item scale was adapted to ask mothers and fathers the degree to which their adolescents conformed to their expectations on the same issues. Internal consistency reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alphas) for the scales measuring adolescents' and mothers' perceptions of adolescent conformity to mothers' expectations were .78 and .73, respectively. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability coeficients for the scales measuring adolescents' and fathers' perceptions of adolescent conformity to fathers' expectations were .80 and .76, respectively.

Measures of Adolescent and Parental Perceptions of Parental Qualities. Adolescent perceptions of parental power (i.e., expert power, legitimate power, reward power, and coercive power) and parental and adolescent perceptions of parental behaviors (support, coercion, positive induction, and negative induction) were examined in relation to both adolescents' and parents' perceptions of adolescent conformity to parental expectations. The parental power scales were based upon French and Raven's (1959) conceptualizations of power

bases. Parental expert power was measured using an 8-item Likert-type scale assessing adolescent perceptions of each parent's potential to influence the adolescent based upon specialized knowledge (Cronbach's alpha = .79). Parental legitimate power was measured using a 6-item Likert-type scale measuring adolescents' perceptions of each parent's potential to influence the youth based upon their "right" to influence based upon their position in the family (Cronbach's alpha = .79). Parental reward power was assessed using a 3-item Likert-type scale asking adolescents' perceptions of each parent's ability to influence the adolescent based upon an ability to mediate rewards (Cronbach's alpha = .72). Parental coerceive power was measured using a 6-item Likert-type scale measuring adolescent perceptions of each parent's ability to bring about negative consequences for the youth (Cronbach's alpha = .79).

Adolescent perceptions of parental behaviors were measured by asking adolescents to respond twice (i.e., once about the mother, once about the father) to Likert-type scales measuring parental support (4 items), parental positive induction (5 items), parental negative induction (4 items), and parental coercion (6 items). These scales were estabished using items with the highest factor loadings from an earlier factor analytic solution based on Schaefer's (1965) Parent Behavior Inventory, the Heilbrun and Cornell measures of parental support, and Hoffman's (1970) formulation of parental induction (Peterson, Rollins, & Thomas, 1985). Respective internal consistency reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alphas) for adolescent perceptions of maternal support, paternal support, maternal positive

induction, paternal positive induction, maternal negative induction, paternal negative induction, maternal coercion, and paternal coercion were .80, .82, .84, .87, .78, .77, .80, and .79.

Parental perceptions of their own support, positive induction, negative induction, and coercion behaviors toward the youth were measured by adapting the previously described scales to ask parents to report on their own behaviors. Internal consistency reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alphas) for mothers' perceptions of their support, positive induction, negative induction, and coercion behaviors were .71, .80, .79, and .69. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for fathers' percpetions of their support, positive induction, negative induction, and coercion behaviors were .77, .79, .74, and .68. The demographic variables (i.e., gender of adolescent, parental marital status, and fathers' occupational level) were measured using standard fact sheet items. Fathers' occupational level was coded using the occupational prestige scores on Duncan's Socioeconomic Index (1961).

Analysis

The analysis consisted of four multiple regression models. Adolescents' perceptions of four dimensions of parental power bases (i.e., expert, legitimate, reward, and coercive power), adolescents perceptions of four parental behaviors (i.e., support, coercion, positive induction, and negative induction), parental perceptions of parental behaviors (i.e., support, coercion, positive induction, and negative induction) and three control variables (i.e., paretnal martial status, gender of adolescent, and fathers' occupational level)

were entered into each of the four regression models (i.e., adolescent/mother and adolescent/father dyads using adolescent perceptions of conformity and the adolescent/mother and adolescent/father dyads using parental perceptions of conformity. The extent to which multicollinearity existed within each model was examined more precisely be conducting tolerance tests using the default value of .07 as the low level for tolerance.

Results

Adolescents' Perceptions of Conformity as Predicted by Parental Qualities

Partial confirmation was provided for the hypotheses that adolescent perceptions of conformity to parental expectations would be predicted by adolescent and parental reports of parental qualities. Specifically, adolescent perceptions of legitimate power, coercive power, and positive induction resulted with significant positive coefficients with adolescent perceptions of conformity, while coercion was a significant negative predictor of conformity in the mother-adolescent dyad (see Table 1). In addition, the expectations that adolescent perceptions of parental expect power, legitimate power, coercive power, and support would be significant positive predictors of adolescent perceptions of conformity were supported within the father-adolescent model (see Table 2). Finally, boys reported significantly less conformity to mothers than girls (see Table 1).

Parental Perceptions of Conformity as Predicted by Parental Qualities

Positive beta coefficients that attained significance were demonstrated for adolescents' reports of parental power and mothers'

reports of positive induction as predictors of mothers' perceptions of adolescent conformity (see Table 1). In contrast, marital status was the only significant beta coefficient yielded as a predictor of fathers' perceptions of adolescent conformity (see Table 2). Married fathers perceived significantly greater conformity by adolescents than divorced fathers.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study highlight the importance of examining multiple perceptions of adolescent-parent relations within the symbolic interactionist perspective. Consistent with Gecas and Schwalbe's (1986) study of multiple perceptions of parental behaviors as predictors of adolescent self-esteem, this study supports the idea that during adolescence parents and adolescents may perceive and define parental qualities (i.e., behaviors and power) and adolescent qualities (e.g., conformity) in different ways. Further investigation is needed to more fully understand the reciprocal nature of parent/adolescent perceptions of the symbolic meaning of relationships within the symbolic interactionist perspective.

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Table 1

Multiple Regression Analysis of Adolescents' and Mothers' Perceptions of Mothers' Qualities as Predictors of Adolescent Conformity

Predictor Variables	Adolescents' Reports[a]			Mothers' Reports[b]		
	b	B	F	b	B	F
Adolescents' Report						
Expert Power	.08	.07	1.67	-.01	-.01	.01
Legitimate Power	.38	.28	23.62***	.19	.17	6.02
Reward Power	.09	.04	.52	-.14	-.08	1.22
Coercive Power	.21	.18	11.81***	.08	.08	1.66
Support	.25	.12	3.59	.26	.14	3.81*
Coercion	-.29	-.22	10.44**	.06	.06	.44
Positive Induction	.22	.15	6.27**	-.04	-.04	.41
Negative Induction	.01	.01	.02	-.02	-.02	.04
Mothers' Report						
Support	-.28	-.07	1.99	.00	.00	.99
Coercion	.08	.04	.55	-.02	-.01	.02
Positive Induction	.07	.03	.35	.40	.20	10.22**
Negative Induction	.08	.04	.52	-.14	-.08	1.49
Sociodemographic Variables						
Parental Marital Status	-.22	-.02	.19	-.34	-.04	.46
Gender of Adolescent	-1.06	-.12	7.45**	-.45	-.06	1.36
Fathers' Occupational Level	.00	-.03	.28	.00	.00	.01
Multiple Correlation (R)			.61			.33
Multiple Correlation Squared $(R)^2$			.37			.11
F-Value			12.18***			2.45**

[a] $n = 326$, [b] $n = 322$, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

b = unstandardized betas, B = standardized betas

Table 2.

Multiple Regression Analysis of Adolescents' and Fathers' Perceptions of Fathers' Qualities as Predictors of Adolescent Conformity

Predictor Variables	Adolescents' Reports[a]			Fathers' Reports[b]		
	b	B	F	b	B	F
Adolescents' Report						
Expert Power	.14	.13	4.79*	.00	.00	.00
Legitimate Power	.43	.34	32.53***	.04	.04	.32
Reward Power	-.05	-.02	.12	.14	.07	.98
Coercive Power	.25	.22	16.90***	.01	.01	.05
Support	.43	.22	10.53***	.23	.16	3.25
Coercion	-.15	-.11	2.25	.11	.10	1.27
Positive Induction	.10	.07	1.14	-.08	-.07	.80
Negative Induction	-.03	-.01	.08	-.12	-.08	.99
Fathers' Report						
Support	-.02	-.00	.01	-.01	.00	.00
Coercion	.08	.04	.54	-.02	-.01	.04
Positive Induction	-.05	-.02	.11	.25	.13	2.75
Negative Induction	.11	.04	.76	-.23	-.12	3.28
Sociodemographic Variables						
Parental Marital Status	-.01	.00	.00	-1.51	-.13	4.98*
Gender of Adolescent	-.69	-.08	2.74	-.46	-.07	1.20
Fathers' Occupational Level	.01	-.08	2.89	.00	.00	.00
Multiple Correlation (R)			.64			.32
Multiple Correlation Squared $(R)^2$			.41			.10
F-Value			13.60***			2.11**

[a] $n = 307$, [b] $n = 295$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

b = unstandardized betas, B = standardized betas

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